

# Identity in Fiction Translation. A Pragmatic Approach to Linguistic Culture

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the translation of identity implicatures conveyed by linguistic cultural elements through an approach based on Relevance Theory. A theoretical framework is established to explore how a linguistic cultural element provides stimulus for the readers of the original novel to interpret the characters' identities through dialogues, and how these identity values could be transformed through translation and therefore perceived differently. Based on two Spanish novels and their Chinese translations, *La Colmena* and *El Jarama*, we conclude that linguistic cultural elements do not provide original and target readers with the same implicatures about the characters' identities, due to the difference in how original and target readers interpret the nuances provided. The five parameters - politeness expressions, emotional expressions, communicative markers, dialect varieties, and set phrases - validate this relationship between identity values and linguistic cultural referents and prove helpful in analyzing a character's relational and collective identity.

**Keywords:** identity implication, linguistic culture, sociolinguistic values, fictional characters, relevance theory.

## Identidad en la Traducción de Ficción. Un Enfoque Pragmático a la Cultura Lingüística

**Resumen:** Este estudio investiga la traducción de las implicaciones de las identidades transmitidas a través de elementos culturales lingüísticos, basándose en la Teoría de la Relevancia. Se establece un marco teórico para indagar de qué forma los referentes culturales lingüísticos actúan como estímulo para que los lectores de la novela original puedan interpretar las identidades de los personajes a través de los diálogos, y cómo estas interpretaciones se ven afectadas por la traducción, pudiendo dar lugar a percepciones distintas. Al analizar dos novelas españolas, *La Colmena* y *El Jarama*, junto con sus traducciones al chino, se concluye que los elementos culturales lingüísticos no transmiten las mismas implicaciones sobre las identidades de los personajes a los lectores de la obra original y a los lectores de la traducción, debido a las diferencias en la interpretación de los estímulos proporcionados. Los cinco parámetros examinados -fórmulas de cortesía, expresiones emocionales, marcadores comunicativos, variedades dialectales y frases hechas- confirman la relación entre la implicación de la identidad y los referentes culturales lingüísticos, siendo útiles para el análisis de la identidad relacional y colectiva de un personaje.

**Palabras clave:** implicación de la identidad, cultura lingüística, valores sociolingüísticos, personajes ficticios, teoría de la relevancia.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the study of identities has witnessed an enormous boom in research since the role played by identity in sociology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and translation studies is of undeniable significance (see e.g., [Pollali & Sidiropoulou, 2021](#); [Sierra, 2019](#); [Malyuga & McCarthy, 2018](#)). However, a vast gap still exists around characters' identities in literary translation. Undoubtedly, each novel portrays a set of characters and identities, which can be correctly interpreted by the original culture readers, but might not be recognized by readers from other cultures. A proper understanding of identities contributes to a correct perception of characters, which helps readers to understand the fictitious world accurately, motivating the readers' personal insights about the specific reality ([Nord, 1994](#)), and helps cultural outsiders to gain a better understanding of the original culture. Is it possible for a translation to convey characters' identities to another culture? How much do target readers understand about the characters' identities after the translation is produced? How are the identity values expressed in the original fiction and in the translation? Such topics have not been well documented, and scholarly references are scarce.

Usually, any utterance serves as a crucial marker of the speaker's identity, and real-life listeners regularly use linguistic variables as a basis for judging speakers' social background, prestige, and personality characteristics ([Gumperz & Hymes, 1972](#), p. 12). When writing fiction, the author, who has already taken into consideration readers' knowledge ([Iser, 1987](#), p.107), leaves several implicatures in fictional work for readers to infer, and identity, as an essential social feature of each character, is also defined by the author. For example, in the Spanish novel *La Colmena*, when doña Rosa says *nos ha merengao* ('you got on our nerves'), Spanish readers could not only feel the negative emotion of the speaker, but would also instantly realize the lower social background of the speaker because of the social denotation of the idiomatic expression, and this could be understood as the identity implicature left by the author for doña Rosa's identity. Accordingly, we assume that the stylistic expression employed by the characters is not only created for the story development, but also helps readers to completely comprehend the character's identity. Can the translated text convey the exact identifiable clue to target readers? To answer this question, we will refer to relevance theory ([Gutt, 2014](#); [Sperber & Wilson, 1986](#)) and will consider linguistic elements as cultural referents ([Nida, 1945](#)) during intercultural communication.

In translation studies, instances that carry extra connotations are considered as cultural referents, which require readers to have specific cultural knowledge to decode the implicit information contained in the original work. Linguistic culture is one of the five categories of cultural elements proposed by [Nida \(1945\)](#), who is the first to address cultural problems in translation; in his pioneer studies, he classifies linguistic culture from a linguistic point of view in the following categories: 1) phonological aspects, 2) morphological traits, 3) syntactic characteristics and 4) lexical factors. Later, as pointed out by [Whorf \(1956\)](#), in [Katan & Taibi \(2021, p. 136\)](#), "understanding of the interface between language and culture lays not so much in the lexis (the labelling) but in the underlying patterns". Therefore, the

established relation between language and culture must also be conveyed in translation. More recently, the functionalist school has stressed the social magnitude of cultural issues (Vermeer, 1983; Nord, 1997). Based on this, Molina (2006, p. 78) highlights the dynamic quality of cultural referents and emphasizes their close association with the immediate context. Likewise, Mangiron (2006) extends the linguistic cultural study by considering textual and extratextual factors, such as translators and translation norms. In the Ding's (2020) analysis, the implicatures carried by the linguistic formation of cultural linguistic instances have been taken into consideration. She argues that when linguistic forms of linguistic cultural elements are lost in translation, the implicit meaning conveyed may also disappear.

Concerning the relationship between cultural referents and character's identity in translation study, Santamaria (2000), starting from a socio-cognitive approach, explored the social value linked to the mental representations attached to each cultural referent. We understand mental representations according to the terms established by van Dijk (1998a, p. 190), where "shared beliefs or other social cognitions are, in turn, partly derived from episodic models by processes of generalization, abstraction and decontextualization" (van Dijk, 1998a, p. 190). In the Santamaria's view (2000), the cultural referents can carry identical information and perform a referential function that helps the target audience to broaden their knowledge about the fictionalized characters in the original text. Then cultural referents become markers of group identification (see Section 2) enabling viewers of audiovisual productions in a particular sociocultural environment to identify the social group to which the characters belong (Santamaria, 2000; 2001; 2010). However, in her study, linguistic culture was excluded. On this point, Wu (2013) seems to recognize this deficiency, and she particularly explores the connection between identity recognition and linguistic cultural elements. Wu's taxonomy (2013) involves not only linguistic but also paralinguistic factors, including lexicon, syntax, writing, primary qualities, qualifiers, differentiators, alternates, silence, pauses and kinesics. She assumes that familiarity with a linguistic culture helps the viewers identify the social features of the film's characters, namely, to identify the social groups to which the characters belong (Wu, 2013). Still, this approach is not adequate for our study since most instances from this categorization are exclusive to the study of audiovisual materials; therefore, such a theoretical model is not very useful when literary translation is analyzed.

All in all, despite the early recognition of the importance of linguistic cultural issues (Nida, 1945; Newmark, 1981; 1988; Vermeer, 1983; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995; Nord, 1997; Molina, 2006; Mangiron, 2006; Wu, 2013; Ding, 2020), studies describing linguistic cultural elements in translation studies have been limited, and some sociolinguistic values carried through linguistic cultural elements, such as identification implicatures, remain overlooked.

With the objective of studying the identity values carried through linguistic cultural elements in translation, this paper aims to: 1) theoretically explore the relationship between linguistic culture and the fictional character's identity implication, and 2) based on

a corpus of two Spanish novels, *La Colmena* and *El Jarama*, and their Chinese translations, validate such a relationship by retrieving and analyzing, according to the methodology of Relevance Theory, some linguistic cultural elements, which trigger different interpretations of identities among original and target readers.

## 2. Identity markers and Relevance Theory

This investigation mainly aims to discuss the collective and relational aspects of identity. According to Vignoles et al. (2011, p. 3), collective identity refers to people's identification with the groups and social categories to which they belong. Inside these subcultural groups, when members are socialized, they acquire common linguistic patterns, which are shared within their subgroups, such as characteristic forms of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and manners of speaking (Salzman, 1993, p. 194). For this reason, nuances in language use can be found even within a given culture. These stylistic expressions are spread among particular society members and consequently converted into crucial indicators of diverse speech communities (Duranti, 1997, p. 88). Using these specific linguistic markers as a basis, interlocutors can interpret the collective identity of the subcultural group members, such as geographic provenance or social status.

The relational aspect of identity refers to "one's roles vis-à-vis other people" (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 3). Relational identity addresses the interpersonal relationships social members maintain with others. When people see themselves as being members of a given social group, they will not only use particular linguistic patterns, but also share fundamental beliefs, which would influence their social practices (van Dijk, 1998b), such as having similar habits or developing similar ways of interacting and interpreting their social roles. Language, as a form of social behavior, is transmitted, patterned, and embedded in human social experiences (Gregory & Carroll, 1978, p. 3, 86). During long term cultural socialization, speakers learn indispensable social rules related to linguistic knowledge, that fit into their relational identity, such as forms of addressing petitions, using formal and informal formulas for visiting, or good speech manner. This helps their interlocutors to perform appropriately via verbal communication and establish and maintain relationships with others (Albert, 1972). Accordingly, the linguistic behaviors that fit their social roles become relational identity markers of the speaker.

Moreover, identity is not only a crucial sociolinguistic parameter in the real social world, but also an essential component of the fictional characters that novel writers employ. The objective of authors who write realistic novels is to portray fiction in a manner that closely resembles real life. As accurately asserted by Viñó (2005, p. 52), such novels are a microcosm of different social worlds. In this miniature virtual society, we can observe the complete social network including members of different social groups, the relationships connected between them, and the linguistic preferences of the characters (Alonso, 1998). It is argued that the internal stratification of language is also indispensable in literary fiction (Viñó, 2005, p. 52) and is the premise of plurilingualism for the novel (Bajtin, 1989). Bajtin (1989) argues that stylistic expressions are a prolocutor of the social community to which

the fictional character belongs and are the crucial part of the characters that marks their social stratification identities. Accordingly, we assume that the language stratification employed by the characters is not only created by the author for the story development, but also helps readers achieve a complete comprehension of the character's identity; this is what the author aims with the story. Since communicators use linguistic variables as a basis for judging their partners' identity information in real life communication, we have good reason to believe that they are also able to recognize the identity markers implied in stylistic dialogues of characters and, finally, sort out the identity information denoted by the author.

Human beings can “draw inferences from people's behavior” (Gutt 2014, p. 24). As argued by Relevance Theory, the audiences grasp what the communicator ‘means’ using correct contextual information (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Gutt, 1991; 2014). However, the informative meaning stressed by Sperber & Wilson (1986) and Gutt (1991; 2014) is not the only implicature inferred by the audience during a conversation, since listeners will unconsciously try to figure out the communicator's identity as well (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972).

Yet, the nature of each language and its language variation are culturally different across each language, as pointed out by Catford (1965, p. 85, 91), some specific markers in the source language text may be different from those in the target. This means that the connection that has been established between the linguistic cultural referents and the identity implicatures among original readers may vary from what is set within the target. Consequently, there is good reason to believe that the implied identity information conveyed by original linguistic cultural referents might not be always communicated to translation receivers.

As relevance theory indicates, hearers can obtain all implied information if they can retrieve from the “stimulus” enough relevant assumptions from the potential context at any time (Gutt, 1991; 2014). These “assumptions about the world” are called cognitive environment, which is “a psychological construct”, a set of “premises used in interpreting the utterance” (Gutt, 2014, p. 27; Sperber & Wilson, 1986, p. 15). It includes information that can be perceived in the physical environment, information retrieved from memory, and data from both sources (Gutt, 2014, p. 27). According to Sperber & Wilson (1986) and Gutt (2014), the cognitive environment is key to achieving “optimal relevance” of communications with implied information: when the contextual assumption of the interlocutor is available and accessible at any given point, the communication “will yield adequate contextual effects at minimal processing effort” (Gutt, 2014, p. 32).

This means that, when the text is translated into another culture, where individuals have acquired different linguistic knowledge and social cultural assumptions, a relevant “stimulus” needs to be reproduced in the translation to arouse among the target readers similar contextual assumptions as the source readers at a minimal processing effort, so as to obtain the optimal relevance of the implicit properties in the message. The less effort the target readers require to retrieve the mental assumptions, the more possibilities they possess to attain the full interpretation of the implicature intended by the novel author.

### 3. Corpus and methodology

The corpus of the study consists of two Spanish postcivil war novels alongside their Chinese translations, namely *La Colmena* ('Honeycomb') and *El Jarama* ('Jarama River'). *La Colmena* is a prominent fiction novel in Spain; it was first published in this country in 1955 and described the daily lives of people in Madrid in December 1943. It has two Chinese versions, 蜂房 (*Fēng Fáng*, 'Honeycomb') (TT1: Meng, 1986) and 蜂巢 (*Fēng Cháo*, 'Honeycomb') (TT2: Huang & Liu, 1987). *El Jarama* is also a Spanish postcivil war novel that illustrates the lives of a group of young people who spent 16 hours in the outskirts of Madrid. It has one rendition in Chinese, 哈拉马河 (*Hā Lā Mǎ Hé*, 'the River Jarama') (Xiao & Wen, 1984). These two novels were chosen because of (1) the realist style of the narrative, which reveals a high similarity to the real world, (2) a wide range of dialogues, implying a high volume of linguistic cultural elements, (3) a large number of characters, which means numerous diverse identities for study, and (4) both novels were translated in the 80's before the present globalized era facilitated intercultural communication between China and the Western countries.

A total of 705 referents from 10 characters (6 characters in *La Colmena* and 4 in *El Jarama*), which are more accurately described, were finally selected to form the final corpus. These characters were chosen because of their distinct identity backgrounds and notable language varieties in the novels. Then, each source instance containing an identity value was compared with its paired translation in Chinese, considering both cognitive contexts in order to determine the final taxonomy of the linguistic culture for this study. The present corpus revealed the following categories: (1) politeness expressions, (2) emotional expressions, (3) communicative markers, (4) dialect varieties, and (5) phraseological resources. Within the analysis, the situational context is first presented to understand the fictional conversation circumstance, which is also a basic parameter for the implicature interpretation. Secondly, the pragmatic quality, or rather, the informative intention of the utterance, will be presented, as well as the identification clue conveyed through the original linguistic cultural segments. Subsequently, the Spanish and Chinese cognitive environments of the readers are compared for exploring the processing efforts that the linguistic cultural instances take to generate the maximal contextual effect in each context. Despite the fact that it would not be surprising to find that there might be some target readers who have gained particular knowledge, which may be different from the common knowledge of the society to which they belong, our objective is to compare the level of traditional cultural beliefs of each society. The present study will not consider the slight differences in the cognitive environment of different readers from the same culture. Finally, a detailed discussion and conclusion will be followed to summarize the regularities of the linguistic cultural referents on the codification of identification implicatures.

## 4. Results and analysis

To carry out the analysis on the elements retrieved from the two novels in Spanish and their translations, we created a table related to each element from the five abovementioned categories. As explained previously, we analyzed the identity implicatures that original and target readers might derive from each item of our corpus, according to the stimulus originated by their cultural and pragmatic backgrounds. Using examples for each category, we will now show how we carried out our study.

### 4.1 Politeness expressions

The politeness utilized in verbal communication is culturally different (Escandell Vidal, 1998, p. 9). As a series of social norms, politeness can regulate the appropriate behavior of members from different communities (Escandell Vidal, 1993, p. 136), who have the purpose of maintaining their good relationships with others (Carrasco Santana 1999, p. 37) and protecting public identities (Bravo, 2005, p. 32). Therefore, as a cultural issue and an instrument to maintain social relationships and identities, politeness expressions have been considered in the study of linguistic culture. As shown in the table below (Table 1), there are 40 instances in the original novel *La Colmena* and 57 in *El Jarama*.

Table 1. Number of politeness expressions identified in the corpus.

| <i>La Colmena</i> |        | <i>El Jarama</i> |        |
|-------------------|--------|------------------|--------|
| Character         | Number | Character        | Number |
| Don Mario         | 5      | El alcarreño     | 0      |
| Don Roberto       | 6      | Esnáider         | 9      |
| Doña Ramona       | 4      | Juez             | 38     |
| Doña Rosa         | 10     | Sebastián        | 10     |
| Doña Visitación   | 12     |                  |        |
| Señor Suarez      | 3      |                  |        |
| Total             | 40     | Total            | 57     |

Even though politeness is employed to achieve the same goal of maintaining a good relationship with others in both Spanish and Chinese societies, as a cultural issue, different patterns of politeness expressions have been developed within each society and are used in different situations. In Spain, polite expressions tend to be used in every relationship, such as among friends, family members, with leaders, or employees. However, unlike the explicit polite expressions present in the Spanish culture, politeness verbalizations are used differently in Chinese society, where the frequent use of politeness in some intimate relationships, such as family members or close friends, keeps the interlocutors at a distance. That is to say, in a traditional Chinese cognitive context, when polite expressions, such as gratitude or apology, are used during the conversation, it is assumed that a very close relationship between the conversational partners has not been established.

Another different social application of politeness expressions between these two cultures occurs in the relationship between individuals with authority and those lacking it. In cultures of higher power distance<sup>1</sup>, such as China, it is believed appropriate and necessary to maintain differences between social classes (Lustig & Koester, 2012, p. 118). Taoism, one of the principal ideologies in Chinese culture, also emphasize the importance of social norms, mainly courtesy, for protecting social dissimilarities (Gu, 1992, p. 10). Social rules related to the politeness dictate that superiors or elders would prefer to maintain their social identity by showing fewer politeness expressions to juniors. Conversely, those of younger age or lower social position are trained to act in a courteous manner to demonstrate respect and obedience. On the other hand, in the contextual assumption of Spanish readers, in a lower power distance culture, the expression of politeness is less complicated, as shown in the following example:

(1) ST: *Perdóname*, hijita.

'Forgive me, little daughter'.

TT1: 原谅我吧, 亲爱的孩子。

*Yuán liàng wǒ ba*, qīn ài de hái zi.

'Forgive me, dear daughter'.

TT2: 原谅我吧, 孩子。

*Yuán liàng wǒ ba*, hái zi.

'Forgive me, daughter'.

Doña Visitación has noticed the smell of tobacco on her daughter, Julia, and asks her if she has been smoking. When she received a negative reply from her daughter, the mother keeps asking if somebody has kissed her. Julia, who wanted to behave as a decent woman in that period, blames her mother for such a sudden question. Thus, doña Visitación, upon realizing that her behavior has bothered her daughter, asks for forgiveness.

In the original situational context, when doña Visitación becomes aware that she has embarrassed her daughter, as a mother, she immediately apologizes for her unsuitable question. Obviously, the informative intention of the original expression *Perdóname* ('Forgive me') is to apologize to the daughter for her inappropriate behavior. Meanwhile, this pragmatic quality is maintained in both Chinese versions by the literal translation 原谅我吧 (*yuán liàng wǒ ba*, 'Forgive me'). This translation ensures the correct recognition of the request for forgiveness among the Chinese readers, who would not invest too much processing effort to process it.

Nevertheless, as claimed previously, the pragmatic value is not the only implied content in the original utterance. There are also identification clues that may arise among different interpretations by the target readers, such as the identity of doña

<sup>1</sup> As Lustig & Koester (2012, p. 118) define, the power distance refers to "the degree to which cultures believe that social and political power should be distributed disproportionately, shared un-equally, and concentrated among a few top decision makers".

Visitación and the relationship she has with her daughter. In the Spanish social context, the apology between mother and daughter is nothing unsuitable in such immediate circumstances, since it reflects that doña Visitación wants to behave as a kind polite mother, as well as showing respect for her daughter. On the contrary, unlike Spanish cultural traditions, among Chinese readers' contextual assumptions, it is not common for family members to apologize to each other, let alone an elder to a junior. This means that Chinese readers might not have enough cognitive knowledge to interpret the polite and easygoing identity of doña Visitación, and it would also require too much processing effort for them to understand the relationship revealed between the Spanish mother and daughter. Conversely, this might even lead to a divergent interpretation among the target readers, for example, about the mother, who, in the Chinese cultural context seems to act like a nervous and severe woman.

#### 4.2 Emotional expressions

The expression of emotions is the key interactional tool that regulates intimacy or distance between individuals. It is learned and developed through different phases of socialization (Sela-Sheffy & Leshem, 2016, p. 449-450). As Gross & Feldman (2011, p. 11) argue, emotions are usually constrained by participant roles and social context. During socialization, group members learn related social knowledge about when and how to demonstrate emotions in certain circumstances, and as a result, they become capable of conceiving and controlling their own emotional utterances. For example, when someone feels a certain negative emotion, they will first consult their cultural values to check if it is appropriate to display anger in such circumstances and whether it is necessary to take measures to control it to protect their own identities.

Furthermore, the manifestation of emotion is a cultural product (Turner & Stets, 2006), and social norms about when to demonstrate positive or negative emotions vary from culture to culture. According to Hall (1976), cultures differ from high to low context. Countries such as China belong to high context cultures, where emotional expressions are reserved for promoting and sustaining harmony among interactants (Lustig & Koester, 2012, p. 102 -105). 以和为贵 (*yǐ hé wéi guì*, 'harmony is most precious') represents one of the principal ideologies of Confucianism, which requires its social members to minimize conflicts, conceal negative emotions, foster harmonious relationships, and thus protect their own identities. Whereas in some lower-context cultures, such as Spanish society, verbal communication primarily aims to convey the exact message. Accordingly, emotional expressions in such social context are typically more explicit and readily observable (Lustig & Koester, 2012, p. 102). The different contextual assumptions about social patterns of emotional expressions across cultures could lead to diverse interpretations of characters' identities between source and target readers. In what follows, we have found 58 emotional referents in the original novel *La Colmena* and 32 in *El Jarama*.

Table 2. Number of emotional expressions elements located.

| <i>La Colmena</i> |        | <i>El Jarama</i> |        |
|-------------------|--------|------------------|--------|
| Character         | Number | Character        | Number |
| Don Mario         | 1      | El alcarreño     | 15     |
| Don Roberto       | 2      | Esnáider         | 3      |
| Doña Ramona       | 1      | Juez             | 0      |
| Doña Rosa         | 39     | Sebastián        | 14     |
| Doña Visitación   | 11     |                  |        |
| Señor Suarez      | 4      |                  |        |
| Total             | 58     | Total            | 32     |

(2) ST: *¿No te fastidia? Ahora las pagas conmigo. No se le puede ni tocar.*

‘Doesn’t it *annoy you*? Now you can *vent your anger with me*.’ You cannot even be touched.’

TT: 你恼了吧?那你就跟我算账吧。这家伙连碰都碰不起。这家伙连碰都碰不起。

*Nǐ nǎo le ba? Nà nǐ jiù gēn wǒ suàn zhàng ba. Zhè jiā huò lián pèng dōu pèng bù qǐ. Zhè jiā huò lián pèng dōu pèng bù qǐ.*

‘*Are you annoyed?* Then you can *hold me accountable*. This guy *cannot even be touched*.’

Miguel and Sebastián are two young men who have come to the outskirts for a holiday near the Jarama River, and now they are relaxing on the bank. Miguel has a girlfriend, but he has not married her because of conflicts within his family. Sebastián wants to give him some advice, but Miguel loses his patience. The two men are arguing, and Sebastián reproaches Miguel with negative verbal expressions.

In the original, expressions like *fastidiar a alguien* (‘annoy someone’) and *pagarla con alguien* (‘vent one’s anger with someone’) carry negative connotations to source readers. In the translation, this negative emotion is rendered with two idiomatic phrases in Chinese, 算账 (*suàn zhàng*, ‘hold accountable’) and 碰不起 (*pèng bù qǐ*, ‘cannot be touched’), which further intensify the negative attitude of Sebastián. Therefore, this rendition will activate enough contextual knowledge among Chinese readers to interpret it as a manifestation of a negative emotion.

As regards the reception of identity information, in the original context, where the emotional manifestation is more explicit and direct, when there is a disagreement or conflict between friends, negative expressions - such as anger, reproach, or irony - are permitted to a great extent without hurting their relationship. For this reason, Spanish readers would regard the conflict between Miguel and Sebastián as a typical disagreement between friends that will not harm the relationship they have already built. Nonetheless, in the Chinese social context, to maintain social harmony, when a disagreement arises between friends, it is not suitable to point out faults or confront the conflict directly,

since the social members are expected to maintain a positive relationship with others and to protect their relational identity. For this reason, Chinese social members may endeavor to conceal their anger and maintain harmony. Nevertheless, if someone fails to control their negative emotions, it will diminish the relationship they have previously enjoyed. Therefore, despite maintaining the pragmatic value of the negative emotion in the translation, Chinese readers might have a different interpretation of the relational identities between the two fictional characters and misunderstand the further development of their friendship due to the contrasting cognitive environments about the social norms of negative verbal manifestations in each culture.

### 4.3 Communicative markers

Communicative markers are invariable linguistic elements that maintain the discourse and connect two communicative segments (Martín Zorraquino & Portolés, 1999, p. 4057; Schiffrin, 1987; Briz, 1993, p. 167). They usually lose the original literal meaning and acquire a new pragmatic function: to formulate and organize conversational interactions. This pragmatic function of helping the communicative articulation also encourages social interaction between interlocutors, thus may enhance the maintenance of social relationships and imply identification clues.

According to Ding (2019), the Spanish communicative markers are classified as the following three types: 1) conversational markers -which control communicative turns, such as *bueno* ('well'), *anda* ('go'), 2) contact markers -which strengthen or weaken the tone, such as *hombre* ('man'), *mujer* ('woman'), and 3) vocatives, which draw attention to the interlocutor and show affection or antipathy, such as *amiguito* ('little friend'), *bonita* ('beauty'). Each of them may carry implicatures of social relationships between interlocutors. For example, the conversational marker *anda* ('go'), which indicates the interruption of the previous topic and the will to start another, forms various grammatical conjugations depending on the social relationship with the listeners, such as *anda* ('go') to speak with *tú* ('you' as the second person) and *ande* ('go') with *usted* ('you' that indicates respect and courtesy). When the interlocutor changes the communicative marker from *ande* to *anda*, this may mean the change of relational identities between them.

Meanwhile, Chinese vocatives also convey social markers about the speaker's identity information. As stated before, as one of the high power distance cultures, it is considered appropriate to maintain social differences in China (Lustig & Koester, 2012, p. 118), and the vocative is one of the linguistic corroborations for this social phenomenon. In everyday life, individuals with administrative duties or higher social positions are more commonly addressed using corresponding vocatives, such as 魏院长 (*wèi yuàn zhǎng*, 'dean Wei') or 王医生 (*wáng yī shēng*, 'doctor Wang'). Similarly, in Chinese contextual circumstances, young members would not be permitted to directly address the seniors by their names (Chen, 1990; Li, 2001). The social norm is to address them with common appellatives, such as father, uncle, which demonstrate respect.

As for this category, 152 markers are detected in the original novel *La Colmena* and 138 in *El Jarama*, which is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Number of communicative markers.

| <i>La Colmena</i> |        | <i>El Jarama</i> |        |
|-------------------|--------|------------------|--------|
| Character         | Number | Character        | Number |
| Don Mario         | 22     | El alcarreño     | 24     |
| Don Roberto       | 18     | Esnáider         | 2      |
| Doña Ramona       | 16     | Juez             | 47     |
| Doña Rosa         | 50     | Sebastián        | 65     |
| Doña Visitación   | 41     |                  |        |
| Señor Suarez      | 5      |                  |        |
| Total             | 152    | Total            | 138    |

(3) ST: Toma, Lucí, *bonita*.

‘Take it, Lucí, *beauty*.’

TT: 抓吧, 露西, 我的小美人。

Zhuā ba, lù xī, wǒ de xiǎo měi rén.

‘Take it, Lucí, *my little beauty*.’

Sebastián and Lucía are playing a lottery game with nine other young people to decide who gets food for lunch. Sebastián’s girlfriend, Paulina, is also present. In the original context, *bonita* (‘beauty’) is a conventional vocative used by Sebastián to catch Lucía’s attention. Meanwhile, in the translation, it is rendered with a literal translation by adding a possessive adjective of the first person: 我的小美人 (wǒ de xiǎo měi rén, ‘my little beauty’). Undoubtedly, this expression could also serve as a vocative in the target cognitive context, which maintains the pragmatic function of drawing attention to the interlocutor.

Nevertheless, the positive result is not the same as the reproduction of the identity implicature conveyed in the source text. Spanish appellatives like *guapa* (‘pretty’), *bonita* (‘beauty’), *niña* (‘girl’) were generally used between friends in the original cognitive environment of the period when the novel was written, to yield some extent of amiability and confidence. The original vocative *bonita* (‘beauty’) used by Sebastián confirms their close friendship, and Spanish readers will obtain maximal contextual effect from this without expending much processing effort. In the translation, besides adding the possessive adjective, the translator also incorporates another adjunct 小 (‘little’) before the flattering appellative 美人 (*měi rén*, ‘beauty’) to reproduce a relaxed atmosphere. However, despite the fact that in the Chinese social context, the compliment is considered a strategy to get closer to the listener, it is not regarded as polite behavior for a man to express admiration for a woman’s beauty. This is because Confucianism teaches that a man and a woman should keep their distance. Consequently, Chinese readers do not have enough contextual knowledge to understand Sebastián’s verbalization of affection to a female friend, let

alone in front of his girlfriend, Paulina. Therefore, we have good reason to believe that the relational identities, that is to say, the social relationship between Sebastián and his friend Lucía, will be interpreted differently by the target readers due to the various cognitive contextual assumptions about social norms.

#### 4.4 Dialect varieties

According to Hatim & Mason (1993), dialect is an important dimension of language varieties. This is learned during socialization and used in everyday life, thus turning into identity markers of the speakers (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972, p. 25). According to Hatim & Mason (1993), geographical, temporal, and social dialects are three main language variations that embody social implicatures. Geographical dialect is related to specific provenance, which indicates the speaker's origin (Catford, 1965; Gregory & Carroll, 1978). The second category, temporal dialect, is related to the historical era when the conversation takes place; it indicates the timeframe when the story occurs. Meanwhile, social dialect refers to linguistic varieties related to social stratification (Hatim & Mason, 1993). Several sociolinguistic studies have explored such relationships. Labov (1972) has examined the relationship between phonetic pronunciation *r* and social hierarchies; Bernstein (1964) concludes that the new generation of the cultured social class also has a high level of verbal expressions, whereas those from lower social class families employ simpler syntax. In sum, there are 47 dialectal elements in the original novel *La Colmena* and 30 in *El Jarama*, Table 4 shows this.

Table 4. Number of dialect varieties.

| <i>La Colmena</i>    |        | <i>El Jarama</i> |        |
|----------------------|--------|------------------|--------|
| Character            | Number | Character        | Number |
| Don Mario de la Vega | 0      | El alcarreño     | 4      |
| Don Roberto          | 0      | Esnáider         | 18     |
| Doña Ramona          | 0      | Juez             | 6      |
| Doña Rosa            | 38     | Sebastián        | 2      |
| Doña Visitación      | 2      |                  |        |
| Señor Suarez         | 7      |                  |        |
| Total                | 47     | Total            | 30     |

(4) ST: Vamos a *darnos un garbeo*, mientras tanto, a ver si hay suerte y nos sale algún apaño por ahí.

'Let us *take a walk*', let's see if we are lucky enough to begin an affair there.'

TT: 咱们去溜达溜达, 碰碰运气, 看看能碰到个什么漂亮人儿。

Zán men *qù liū da liū da*, pèng pèng yùnqì, kàn kàn néng pèng dào gè shénme piàoliang rén er.

'Let's *go for a stroll*, try our luck, and see if we can meet a beautiful woman.'

Sebastián's girlfriend, Paulina, is talking with other girls, and Sebastián cannot join them. So, he jokes with another young man about if they can go for a walk and meet some other women. In the original, *darse un garbeo* ('take a walk') is a dialect from Madrid and it is one of the identifiable markers of the speaker found in the novel. The original readers, sharing a similar cognitive environment with the novel's author, can recognize this geographic dialect, which reminds them that these young men come from Madrid. Moreover, contemporary readers would recognize this as an antiquated expression, which was commonly used in the last century, when the novel was written. Consequently, for original modern readers, this expression indicates the era when the story occurs, i.e., in the Spanish post Civil War.

Whereas, in translation, 去溜达溜达 (*qù liū da liū da*, 'go for a stroll') is an ordinary expression in Chinese, it does not carry any geographic or temporal stimulus for the target readers. As a result, it becomes challenging for them to activate corresponding contextual knowledge to determine the identity information of the character implied in the original novel.

#### 4.5 Set phrases

The meaning of set phrases is not related to the meaning of each word in the utterance (Timofeev, 2006, p. 1030). The fixed order of the phrases allows repetition in numerous situations throughout the whole country, and speakers learn them and use them naturally and spontaneously (Casares, 1992, p. 229). With this repetition and spontaneous use, phraseological resources arrive at a series of new connotations, i.e., attain emotional, expressive, or stylistic values thus intensifying the speaker's attitude at the same time (Schellheimer, 2015, p. 62).

Furthermore, as a sociocultural product, phraseological expressions are also source of sociolinguistic variation. Specific phrases are developed within particular social groups, reflecting the environment, conventions, or social behaviors, and accordingly, characterize a given group of speakers. All the expressions are understood by all individuals throughout the entire culture, although not everyone uses them. As a result, speakers of the same culture will have enough contextual knowledge to interpret the entire meaning of the phrases, as well as to recognize a large contextual effect regarding the social identification information of the speaker.

Although sayings and idiomatic expressions could be considered as elements that share a lot of similar characteristics to elements classified as instances of geographic or social dialects, we decided that they needed a specific category precisely because of their pragmatic capacity to add information about emotions and expressive and stylistic values. As demonstrated in Table 5, there are 110 instances in *La Colmena* and 41 in *El Jarama*.

Table 5. Number of instances of phraseological resources.

| <i>La Colmena</i> |        | <i>El Jarama</i> |        |
|-------------------|--------|------------------|--------|
| Character         | Number | Character        | Number |
| Don Mario         | 5      | El alcarreño     | 22     |
| Don Roberto       | 1      | Esnáider         | 0      |
| Doña Ramona       | 2      | Juez             | 1      |
| Doña Rosa         | 81     | Sebastián        | 18     |
| Doña Visitación   | 17     |                  |        |
| Señor Suarez      | 4      |                  |        |
| Total             | 110    | Total            | 41     |

(5) ST: No perdamos la perspectiva, yo ya estoy harta de decirlo.

‘Do not lose perspective, I’m tired of saying it.’

TT1: 不能没有眼力架儿, 我不知说过多少遍了。

Bù néng méi yǎn lì jià er, wǒ bù zhī shuō guò duō shǎo biàn le.

‘Do not lose attention to detail, I do not remember how many times I have said.

TT2: 我都说腻了, 我们不能坐井观天, 目光短浅。

Wǒ dōu shuō nì le, wǒ men bù néng zuò jǐng guān tiān, mù guāng duǎn qiǎn.

‘I am tired of saying that, we cannot sit in the well and watch the sky short sighted.’

This is how *La Colmena* begins, and the expression No perdamos la perspectiva (‘Do not lose perspective’) is the statement repeated by doña Rosa during the whole story. In the original cognitive context, doña Rosa uses this idiomatic expression to remind the waiters to keep their minds clear and work hard. The use of a fixed formation of the idiomatic phrase reinforces doña Rosa’s value judgment.

In the first translation, this idiomatic expression is translated by a Chinese *guanyongyu* 眼力架儿 (yǎn lì jià er, ‘do not lose attention to detail’). Meanwhile, in the second, it is translated with two *chengyu* 目光短浅 (mù guāng duǎn qiǎn, ‘with short sightedness’) and 坐井观天 (zuò jǐng guān tiān, ‘sit in the well and watch the sky’), which have a similar metaphoric meaning as the original. *Chengyu* and *guanyongyu* are two distinctive idiomatic expressions in Chinese. *Chengyu* is generally formed by four Chinese characters and derives from, to a large extent, traditional Chinese literature. It is employed more by the upper social class than by those with a lower status. Meanwhile, *guanyongyu* has a high emotional connotation and is mainly used during colloquial and casual conversations. As shown, the original phrase is rendered with Chinese idiomatic expressions in both translations. They both yield adequate contextual effect for their Chinese readers regarding the pragmatic function of the intensification of the utterance.

In terms of the identity implication, the original referent is the expression regularly used by people with a high cultural status. It could help the Spanish readers to identify doña Rosa as a lady acquainted with certain high cultural status expressions. However, in the first translation, the original phrase is replaced by a *guanyongyu*, a colloquial and casual expression in Chinese. It does not convey any denotation of the high cultural status. For this reason, we have enough evidence to believe that this rendition does not provide any stimulus for the Chinese readers to interpret the exact identity information about doña Rosa. Whereas the two *chengyu* employed in the second translation are expressions used to a large extent by learned persons, consequently, this will activate a similar cognitive context among Chinese readers and help them to identify doña Rosa with the correct cultural level.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper set out to explore the translation of linguistic cultural referents that may convey the identity implicatures of fictional characters. It explored the relationship between identity information and the linguistic elements from a pragmatic theoretical point of view and analyzed the linguistic cultural referents present in literary fiction dialogues that convey identity values based on two Spanish-to-Chinese novels based on relevance theory. The theoretical framework for this article is distinctive, as it involves both intercultural translation studies as well as sociolinguistic identity analysis from a pragmatic perspective. In addition, it presented how linguistic cultural referents become identification clues in the original text and how, for target readers, their contextual knowledge helps or hinders their understanding of a given character's identity information in translation.

From these results, we conclude that politeness expressions, emotional expressions, communicative markers, dialect varieties, and set phrases are five important linguistic cultural parameters that convey identity information stimuli, and their translation could affect the understanding of the characters' identities for target readers. Primarily, the examples discussed in Sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, such as politeness, emotional utterances, and communicative markers, demonstrate that the relational identity implication, i.e., the interpersonal relationship established between characters, would vary among target readers due to different contextual assumptions about social norms established in each culture. Linguistic cultural units must be regarded as a reflection of social behaviors that establish cultural distance, a means that helps to manage social relationships with others during intercultural communication.

Secondly, data revealed in Sections 4.4 and 4.5 suggests that not only the dialect varieties, like phonetic or lexical features, could be collective identity indicators of the characters, but phraseological resources could also carry geographic or stratification implicatures of characters, and their translation presents problems of perception among target readers. In addition, the findings highlight the fact that the informative intention is not the single implicature found in these utterances; the identity information concealed behind the characters' dialogues is another crucial implicit parameter that should raise

attention during intercultural communications. Despite maintaining the pragmatic value of the cultural linguistic instances in translation, the sociolinguistic quality, i.e., the relational and collective identity information about the fictional characters, may be interpreted differently or even contrastingly by the target audience due to divergent cognitive contexts formed through the different socialization processes of each culture.

In conclusion, by validating this new linguistic cultural model as a useful tool for establishing cultural distance and analyzing characters' identity implicature, this study seeks to provide some constructive directions for intercultural pragmatic studies: linguistic cultural referents not only convey linguistic or informative values, but also embody the social norms of each culture. Accordingly, cross-cultural equivalents in the target language should be chosen so that not only the pragmatic values but also the identification stimuli that the linguistic cultural referents carry in the original language can be kept. In this way, the translation will help the target audience activate enough relevant assumptions at minimal processing effort and thus perceive the fictional characters at a deeper, more meaningful level.

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